

The Past is Ever-Present: Civil War as a Dynamic Process¹

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Abstract

The literature on civil wars is extensive and growing. Past studies have focused on a series of questions, most notably: what are the causes of civil wars, why do some conflicts last longer than others, what causes civil wars to end, and finally why do some civil wars recur, at times repeatedly? In answering these questions, previous studies have treated each of these problems as discrete and independent phenomena – predominantly focusing on contemporaneous factors as the primary causes of the outcome of interest. While previous studies have made progress in answering each of these questions, I argue that by disaggregating civil wars in this fashion, past studies have missed a critically important aspect of these conflicts –that previous interactions shape the bargaining environment in which combatants interact. Thus, previous studies have implicitly assumed that civil wars are static, rather than dynamic, processes. In contrast, I argue that civil wars are better understood as a dynamic process comprised of a series of stages through which states are at risk of transitioning – from initial peace, to conflict onset, to the outcome of the conflict, to either a recurrence of conflict, or consolidated peace. Actors within a conflict do not bargain in a vacuum. Interactions between actors in previous stages not only affect the course of a civil war – the likelihood of transitioning to a different stage – but also structure the bargaining environment in which actors interact in the present. Drawing on notions of path dependency (Pierson, 2004; Diehl, 2006), I argue that past interactions may exhibit a direct effect on the likelihood of transitioning to a subsequent state, but more importantly, they structure the bargaining environment by providing information about the preferences and capabilities of the combatants. Thus, the effect of contemporaneous factors – e.g. GDP or regime type – on the likelihood of transitioning from one state to another is contingent on the information revealed in previous stages of a conflict. I employ a multi-state event history model, which is capable of empirically modeling civil wars as complex processes composed of a series of possible stages, finding that the effect of oft-cited factors like GDP or regime type is highly contingent on the structure of the bargaining environment. This paper furthers existing studies of civil war by drawing attention to the need to focus on historical interactions, not just contemporaneous factors, and also by integrating the study of civil war into a single analytic framework.

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The result in war is never absolute. Lastly, even the final decision of a whole War is not always to be regarded as absolute. The conquered State often sees in it only a passing evil, which may be repaired in after times by means of political combinations. (von Clausewitz, 1982, 108)

1 Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, intrastate conflict, not interstate conflict, has been the primary form of conflict in world politics. Almost regardless of the measure, civil wars have resulted in more devastation and destruction than any other form of conflict during this time period. In response to this basic fact, a sizable body of literature has developed to explain the causes of these devastating conflicts, with an eye towards preventing them in the future (see for example [Sambanis, 2001](#); [Fearon and Laitin, 2003](#); [Collier and Hoeffler, 2004](#)). Despite significant advances in our understanding of the causes of civil war, and numerous other related issues, one fact remains deeply troubling, and has received comparatively little theoretical or empirical attention – civil wars tend to recur in the same states repeatedly over time ([Walter, 2004](#); [Quin, Mason and Gurses, 2007](#)). Figure 1 reveals the issue with such an approach. While the total number of civil wars occurring in each year has generally increased since the end of the Second World War, there is important heterogeneity in this pattern, that many studies have failed to take into account. Specifically, the patterns of war and peace are more complex than past studies have realized, as an increasing proportion of civil wars over time are in fact recurrences of previous conflicts, not new conflicts. Thus, increasingly, it is the same actors, in the same states, fighting over the same issues that account for the patterns of civil war in the world. Previous studies of conflict that treat all civil wars the same miss this fact, and as a result, do not take into account the critical role that the role of history plays in determining whether states will successfully transition to peace, or remain mired in conflict.

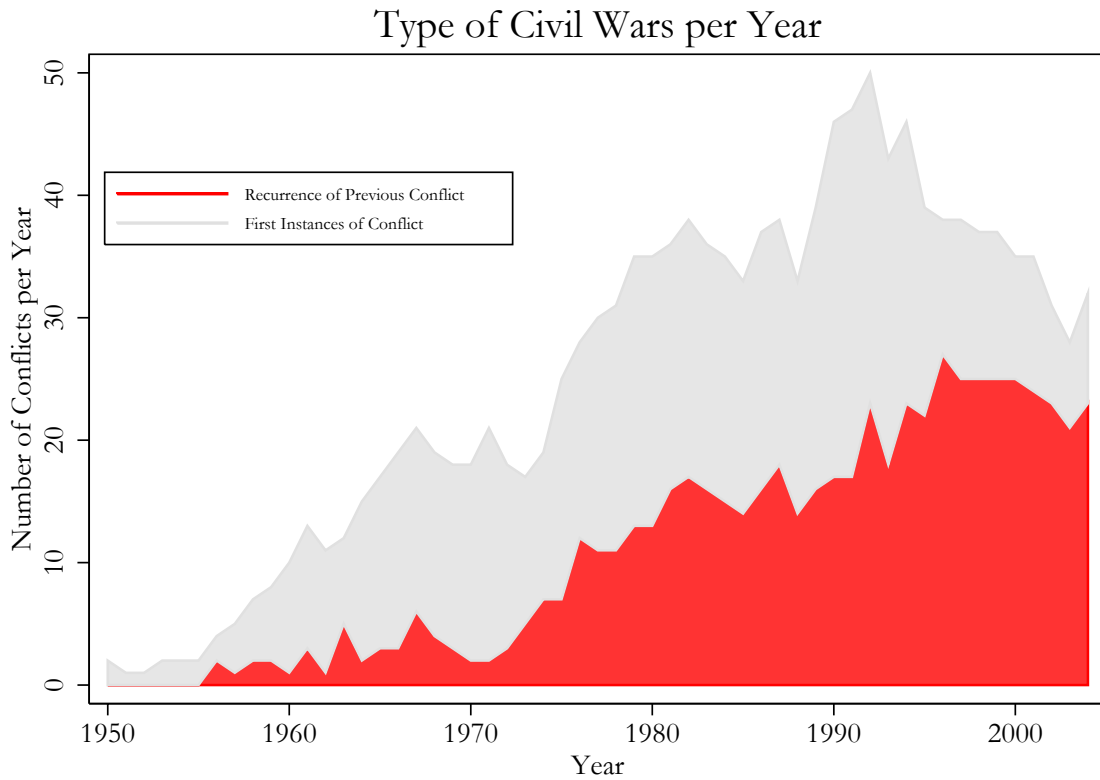


Figure 1: Total ongoing civil wars per year, differentiated by type.

Thus, this paper asks why do some civil wars recur, often repeatedly, whereas other conflicts end definitively? Simply put, why do some countries become enmeshed in a “conflict trap,” in which they fail to develop the institutions and economic capacity needed to reduce their risk of future conflict, whereas other countries are able to overcome these difficulties and transition to a more stable state? The central premise of the conflict trap is that following a war, a state is in a substantially weakened position. Fear and distrust are high between former combatants. Arms and the knowledge required to organize a rebellion are readily available. Both the institutions of the central government and the economy are likely to be weakened, and ill-equipped to meet the needs of the citizenry, providing fertile ground for grievances. Weakened and vulnerable from a previous conflict, a state in this situation is disproportionately more likely to experience a second conflict,

after which, it will face much the same situation as it did previously ([Collier and Sambanis, 2002](#); [Collier, 2007](#)). While this argument has gained increased attention in scholarly work, as well as the popular press, the flip side of the same coin has garnered less attention; if we know that the situation on the ground following a conflict is highly volatile, we also know that it is highly volatile *relative to some more stable baseline*. Escaping the conflict trap, then, becomes a matter of transitioning to this more stable set of circumstances.

In order to better account for this variation, I argue that it is necessary to reconceptualize civil wars as a dynamic, rather than static process. Simply put, such an approach suggests that only considering the present environment in which combatants find themselves in order to explain future patterns of peace and conflict is insufficient. Instead, it is necessary to more fully take into account the history of interactions between combatants, and how these previous interactions structure the bargaining relationship between actors in the present. Thus, this approach is predicated on integrating previous studies of conflict that have only focused on a single stage at a time – eg. conflict termination or conflict recurrence – into a more coherent whole (for more on this point, see [Levy, 1995](#); [Diehl, 2006](#)). This emphasis points to the value of exploring previous interactions between actors, rather than taking them as exogenous because the different stages in a conflict are likely to be closely intertwined. In order to develop a framework capable of explaining the manner in which the previous phases of a conflict affect subsequent phases, I draw heavily on Pierson's ([2004](#)) discussion of a path dependency framework for the study of political phenomena. In particular, I focus on the notion of “contingency,” which suggests that, depending on the timing and the current stage, factors and events may have very different effects. For example, it might be the case that authoritarian political institutions have little effect on whether a conflict recurs following a military victory, but such institutions may dramatically increase the likelihood of a return to vi-

olence in the aftermath of a negotiated settlement, as the effect of such institutions may be highly contingent on the previous interactions between actors. Thus, in order to apply this notion to the study of civil wars, I offer a framework for understanding the potential stages of civil wars in the following section, before systematically analyzing these transitions.

This paper proceeds by briefly reviewing static explanations for conflict recurrence – those that take conflict history for granted, before introducing the concept of stable peace following war. Next, I reconceptualize civil wars as a dynamic process, and propose a new theoretical framework to explain patterns of war and peace. I then test these hypotheses on a data set of all civil war states from 1950-2004. Finally I conclude by considering the implications of viewing civil wars as a dynamic process for the broader literature on conflict, and propose several future directions for this line of research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Static Explanations for Conflict

The literature on conflict termination and recurrence has overwhelmingly focused on a single stage of the conflict, and explains the outcome of interest at that stage in terms of contemporaneous factors (on civil war duration, see: [Walter, 2002](#); [Fearon, 2004](#); [Cunningham, 2006](#); [Powell, 2006](#); [Walter, 2006](#); [Kirschner, 2010](#)). Some effort has been made to move beyond this static understanding, although it has been limited. [Kaufmann \(1996\)](#), for example, argues that the process of ethnic violence itself hardens identities, making ethnic conflicts more difficult to resolve, which suggests some element of dynamism in the effect of ethnicity on conflict, but the implication of this argument for subsequent stages of a civil war, beyond the current round of fighting, is never developed.

[Bleaney and Dimico \(2011\)](#) seek to determine whether the factors that lead to the onset of a civil war are the same as those that lead to the continuation of conflict. Despite these exceptions, the majority of studies aimed at explaining conflict outcomes do so with reference to the current conflict conditions, and generally set aside questions relating to how conflict began in the first place.

Studies of conflict recurrence, more than analyses located at any other stage, tend to incorporate information from previous stages of conflict into their analyses. Walter argues that explanations for conflict recurrence can be grouped into four large families concerned with: the effect of peacekeeping, the nature of the previous conflict, the structure of the post-war settlement and more general country level factors that are equally attributable to the initial onset of conflict (2004, 372). Yet despite the inclusion of factors relating to the nature of a previous conflict, I argue that previous studies have generally mischaracterized the role that the outcomes of previous conflicts play. [Wagner \(2000\)](#) argues that military victories will be more stable than negotiated settlements because they will result in more information revelation (see also [Licklider, 1995](#); [Doyle and Sambanis, 2000](#); [Mukherjee, 2006](#)).² Despite this emphasis, support for the contention that characteristics of the previous conflict affect the likelihood that a conflict will recur have received some mixed support, with [Walter \(2004\)](#) finding that such factors matter little in determining whether conflict will recur. Indeed, Walter finds that state level characteristics, such as wealth and living standards are significantly stronger predictors for recurrent conflict than characteristics of the previous conflict, suggesting that factors such as greed, and state weakness may explain both initial conflict, as well as conflict recurrence. [Flores and Nooruddin \(2009a,b\)](#), on the other hand, build upon previous studies by considering two possible outcomes of interest for post-conflict states – either economic

²[Hartzell, Hoddie and Rothchild \(2001\)](#) and [Hartzell and Hoddie \(2007\)](#) argue that, in contrast to this expectation, negotiated settlements are at least as stable as decisive military victories, if not more so, when the post-Cold War period is taken into account.

recovery, or a return to violence. In so doing, they argue that, contrary to conventional wisdom, democratization following conflict may in fact exacerbate tensions within a state, making commitments less credible, and as a result, forestalling economic recovery, while at the same time making a return to conflict more likely. The authors also argue that military victories substantially prolong the peace following a war, in contrast to negotiated outcomes. While these studies rightly point out that the information revealed following different conflict outcomes may exert a direct effect on the likelihood of recurrence, I argue that the more important effect will be indirect, as these different outcomes will condition the effect of other mechanisms that lead to recurrence. In other words, to account for the mechanisms through which states will return to violent conflict, it is necessary to take into account how states arrived at the peaceful position in which they are in.

By only taking into account the present environment, studies of conflict recurrence miss the historical context governing how a state reached that particular moment. If we look at a typical study of recurrence then, we see that it selects states where the previous conflict has reached a conclusion, regardless of what that conclusion may be. Thus, such studies set aside important questions about the mechanisms by which those states that have experienced a previous conflict were able to terminate that conflict, as states are only at risk of recurrence once their initial conflict has ended. This can be thought of as a statistical concern stemming from selection bias – only considering states that have *fought* and *terminated* a previous conflict likely introduces issues pertaining to a non-random sample.³ While this *might* be the case, I follow [Diehl \(2006\)](#) in arguing that the more important, and ultimately interesting, point to be made here is substantive, not statistical in nature. Simply put, understanding the mechanisms through which states experience conflict, and the

³This is not to suggest that the methodological issue of selection bias in these or other studies is unimportant, it certainly is. Instead, however, I wish to make the case that there are substantive, rather than simply methodological, reasons why we should be concerned about this issue.

eventual termination of that conflict are of theoretical and substantive import, they are not simply statistical issues to be corrected. In order to theorize why some states are more likely to experience a recurrence of conflict, it is necessary to understand how the history of conflict in that state has structured the institutions and bargaining environment within the state in such a way to shape the interactions between potential combatants.

2.2 Positive and Negative Peace

All of the above studies of conflict recurrence commence once a civil war has ended and peace has been attained, but how do we know when peace has actually been achieved?⁴ Conceptualizing peace is notoriously difficult. On the surface, conceptualizing peace seems like a straightforward task – peace is the opposite of war. Despite this apparent simplicity though, there is something fundamentally lacking in this understanding. This point is underscored by the preceding discussion. If we understand peace as the absence of violence, then, conceptually, there is little to distinguish the circumstances in the immediate aftermath of a conflict, and the empirically more stable situation in which a state may find itself in the future. In each situation, violence has abated, yet certainly these two situations differ greatly. In the former, the absence of violence is in doubt, perhaps severely so, whereas in the latter situation, the absence of violence is of much greater certainty. In this respect, the two peaceful situations can be further categorized not only by considering the presence or absence of violence, but also the underlying potential for violence in each situation.⁵ This distinction is the core insight of [Galtung \(1964, 1969\)](#), who offers the classical conceptualization of peace into a dichotomy of either negative or positive peace.

⁴ [Flores and Nooruddin \(2009a,b\)](#) Confront this issue to some extent by considering how long it takes for states to recover economically.

⁵ The underlying potential for violence discussed here should not be confused with what [Galtung \(1969\)](#) refers to as “latent violence.”

During the 1950's and 1960's, the realist paradigm gained increasing influence in academic research on conflict. Given the bipolar security environment and the advent of nuclear weapons, much of the contemporary research became dedicated to identifying the factors that led to war, so as to better manage conflicts and avoid escalation (for a more detailed discussion, see [Richmond, 2008](#)). The realist influence on this research produced a focus on factors that might mitigate the severity or regularity of conflict, but recognized that war was an inherent part of the international environment, and as such peace could not be a permanent feature of the international system. Although prominent in much of the North American research at the time, this view was nevertheless criticized by those that viewed such a limited understanding of peace as incomplete (see for example [Schmid, 1968](#)). Writing in response to these contrasting perspectives, Galtung sought to offer a more holistic vision of peace, capable of incorporating both the more limited understanding of peace, as well as a deeper understanding.

To this end, Galtung offered the notion of peace as a region, not a single point, meaning that even within the broader concept of peace there is room for considerable variation ([1969](#), 168). At the shallower end of this region, negative peace can be thought of, straightforwardly, as the absence of physical violence, or war. Positive peace, on the other hand, is a much deeper form of peace, which entails societal integration, fairness and social justice. Whereas negative peace entails the absence of physical violence, positive peace entails the absence of “structural violence,” which Galtung defines as unequal access to power and an uneven distribution of rights and resources (171). Perhaps the most cogent way to think about this distinction is to adapt an analogy from medicine regarding the health of a given patient. Negative peace would be equivalent to the absence of disease within the patient. Positive peace, by contrast, can be thought of as improving the overall health of the patient, making them better able to resist illness in the future ([Galtung, 1985](#), 145).

From this perspective, positive peace addresses the root causes of conflict, whereas negative peace is more indicative of gaps in the application of physical violence.

This distinction is a useful starting point to think about peace following civil wars. In the immediate aftermath of a conflict, the fighting, or physical violence, has abated. Indeed, most conventional data sets of civil wars define peace in precisely this manner, as violence falling below a certain casualty threshold for a certain period of time ([Sarkees, 2000](#); [Gleditsch et al., 2002](#); [Regan, 2000](#); [Fearon and Laitin, 2003](#)). However, when considering the question of whether or not peace will last following of a civil war, it is insufficient to think of peace only in terms of negative peace, because peace following conflict is not constant, as states will eventually transition to a more stable form of peace. This is the case, because existing studies have shown that states are far more susceptible to civil war when there is poverty, inequality, and weak government institutions unable to address these concerns, and the immediate post-conflict environment displays many of these characteristics (on inequality as a cause of conflict, see [Sambanis, 2001](#); [Boix, 2008](#)). However, as time passes, some states may be capable of overcoming these weaknesses, and as a result, peace will become much more durable. Thus, as states develop economic and political institutions following conflict, they will transition closer towards positive peace, which should ultimately be more stable.

The potential shortcoming of this approach is that a deep understanding of positive peace might set the bar too high. In many respects, a deep definition of positive peace is a normative, aspirational goal rather than an empirical reality, particularly in the context of post-conflict states. This is the case because a deep understanding of positive peace would require an equitable distribution of resources, such as income, literacy, education and so on, which may take decades or more to achieve as these are slow moving indicators in the best of circumstances. Nevertheless, if peace is understood as a region rather than a single point, it is possible to conceptualize an interim point

between negative and positive peace, what I will refer to as stable peace. In this sense, stable peace will share with negative peace an absence of physical violence, but it will also take into account reductions, if not an absolute removal, of structural violence.

3 The Dynamic Nature of Civil Wars

Previous studies of conflict recurrence have generally looked at peace following war as a single outcome, and have questioned whether and how it might be maintained (see for example [Licklider, 1995](#); [Wagner, 2000](#); [Walter, 2004](#); [Mukherjee, 2006](#); [Fortna, 2008](#)). In contrast, the framework presented here contends that peace can be usefully disaggregated into negative and stable variants based upon the extent to which movement towards positive peace has been achieved. [Doyle and Sambanis \(2006\)](#), in one of the few empirical studies to address this question, draw a similar distinction between negative peace – what they term sovereign peace –, and what they refer to as “participatory peace,” which encompasses all of the aspects of negative peace, as well as a minimum standard of political openness (70). While instructive, the approach employed by Doyle and Sambanis is somewhat lacking, as negative and participatory peace are treated as discrete outcomes. In essence, Doyle and Sambanis examine separately the questions of whether negative peace has been achieved two years after the end of a conflict, and whether participatory peace has been achieved two years after a conflict.⁶ Relatedly, [Flores and Nooruddin \(2009a\)](#) conceptualize economic recovery following conflict as having occurred once a state attains a level of GDP at least equal to the highest that it experienced in the five year period prior to the onset of conflict. They then analyze the time until a state either transitions to economic recovery or back to conflict,

⁶They also consider the longer-term situation by testing whether each type of peace held at five and ten year intervals following a conflict.

however, their analysis ceases once such a transition takes place, and as a result, their analysis suffers from a similar static bias, which omits the indirect effect of history. In contrast, the approach I present below differs in that it takes into account the fact that these stages are not separate and unrelated questions, but rather successive stages of a longer peace process, in order to eventually transition to a more stable form of peace, it is first necessary to have negative peace. Thus, when considering the post-conflict process in its entirety, it is possible to view negative peace as an interim stage between war and stable peace, or recovery. This process is depicted visually in Figure 2.

As can be seen, it is possible to summarize this process broadly in three stages. Conflicts must first terminate, meaning that violence falls below a selected threshold, which in turn means that a state will transition to negative peace. From negative peace, it is possible for a state to either backslide to war through a resumption of physical violence, or to transition towards positive peace by reducing some of the factors contributing to an increased conflict propensity. Finally, those states that transition to stable peace are expected to have a lower likelihood of experiencing renewed fighting, but are nevertheless at risk for such a transition. As Figure 2 indicates, negative peace is not a uniform category, as it is possible for violence to end in several different fashions, each of which likely to have a different effect. First, violence may come to an end through negotiations, in which the combatants in a conflict reach a mutually acceptable bargain in which they agree to cease hostilities. Second, violence may end through a military victory in which the armed forces of one side in the conflict defeats the opposition on the battlefield, or the opposition surrenders. Finally, conflicts may end through inactivity, or violence falling below the 25 battle-deaths per year threshold required for a conflict to be coded as ongoing.⁷

⁷Conflicts such as that between Basque separatists and the Spanish government, or FARC rebels in Colombia are

In contrast to previous, static analyses, I consider these to be continuous stages, not just discrete outcomes. For example, if a civil war terminates in a negotiated settlement, the state in question enters the negotiated outcome stage, and remains in this stage until it either transitions to positive peace, war, or is censored. This is important, because I argue that each of these stages is distinct in terms of the information that it reveals, as well as the material environment that it presents to former combatants. With respect to information, it is well established in rationalist studies of conflict that fighting can be thought of as a bargaining process through which information about the capabilities and resolve of the actors is revealed through successive interactions ([Licklider, 1995](#); [Wagner, 2000](#); [Filson and Werner, 2002](#); [Fortna, 2004](#); [Smith and Stam, 2004](#); [Werner and Yuen, 2005](#)). Thus, the manner in which a conflict ends also reveals information. If a conflict ends through a decisive military victory, then this provides clear information that the victorious side is stronger than the defeated side, whereas negotiated or ambiguous outcomes prevent the information revelation process from reaching its end point, thus leaving the true distribution of capabilities between actors uncertain. Moreover, as has been pointed out by [Quin, Mason and Gurses \(2007\)](#); [Mason et al. \(2011\)](#), the outcome of a conflict also has implications for the material capabilities available to the combatants after a war. Military victories typically result in the dismantling, or at least weakening, of the organizational capacity of the defeated side. Negotiated outcomes on the other hand frequently leave the the organization of the previously warring factions largely intact.⁸

Thus, while on the one hand, military victories ought to reveal more information about capabilities, and thus remove the incentive of actors to return to violence in the future by demonstrating the dramatic costs associated with such an action, they will also be less likely to lead to positive

examples of wars where fighting falls to lower levels for a number of year, thus transitioning to inactivity, without a definitive end to the fighting having occurred.

⁸However, see [Toft \(2010\)](#).

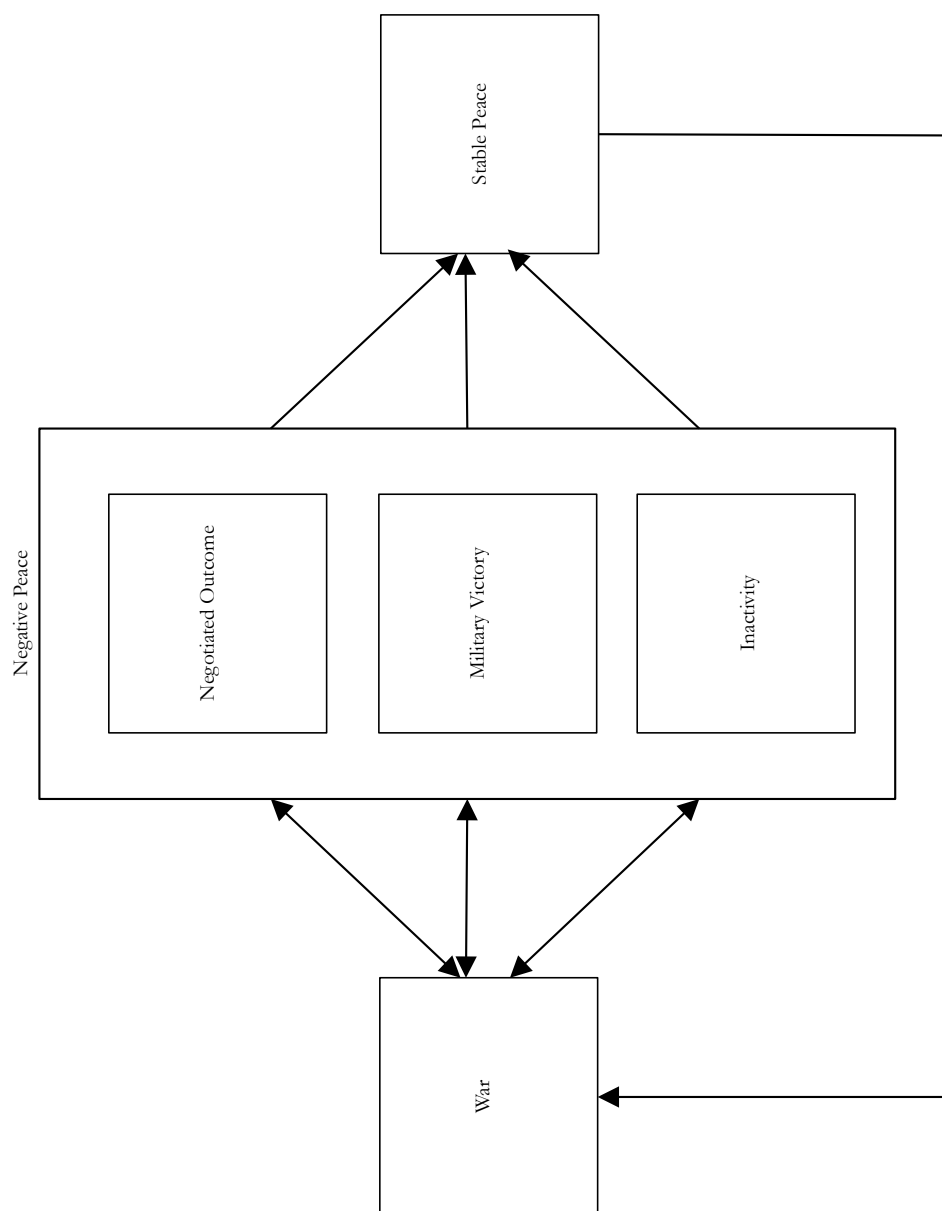


Figure 2: Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Process

peace. This is the case, because following decisive military victories, the victorious side will not need to compromise in order to govern effectively, and as a result, will be unlikely to create the kinds of political institutions needed to move the state towards stable peace, namely ensuring equal access to power. However, once a state has achieved stable peace, it will be much less likely to backslide into conflict, as the state has developed the economic and political institutions required to remove the incentive for actors to return to war – it will be less expensive to redress grievances through political institutions, and the economic opportunity costs of conflict will be quite large. Given these factors, I contend that these different forms of negative peace will exert a direct effect on the likelihood of conflict recurrence, and future transitions to stable peace that can be summarized in the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Conflicts that end in military victories will be less likely than others to transition back to conflict, and less likely to transition to stable peace.*

Hypothesis 2: *Conflicts that end in negotiated settlements will be more likely than others to transition back to conflict, and more likely to transition to stable peace.*

Hypothesis 3: *Once a conflict has reached stable peace, it will be significantly less likely to transition back to war.*

Not only will these outcomes exert a direct affect on the probability of subsequent transitions, they will also strongly condition the effect of other factors by shaping the informational and material environment in distinct ways.

3.1 Contingency Based on the Outcome of a Previous Conflict

A dynamic conceptualization of civil war also permits for a more nuanced analysis of the effect of the outcome of civil war on the likelihood that a conflict will recur. As noted previously, one of the most prominent explanations for the recurrence of civil wars has to do with the amount of

information that was revealed during the previous conflict – where military victories reveal more information about capabilities than negotiated settlements. While this is a useful starting point, simply considering the outcome of the previous conflict is insufficient to explain the recurrence of conflict because *bargaining doesn't end when an outcome is achieved*. As the initial quote from Clausewitz contends, the outcome of a conflict is by no means final. If one party or the other is dissatisfied with the outcome, then they will seek to alter it through the bargaining process, which may or may not include renewed fighting. Thus, the implication of these outcome types isn't so much that they directly increase or decrease the likelihood of conflict recurrence, but rather that they fundamentally structure the nature of the bargaining relationship between actors such that the interactions between two actors following a military victory and a negotiated settlement will be distinct. This points to the contingent nature of the factors that conflict scholars frequently point to in order to explain patterns of civil conflict.

Following a military victory, even if the defeated side is dissatisfied with the outcome of a conflict, and is experiencing significant economic, social and political hardships that are typically associated with a renewed civil war ([Walter, 2004](#)), such factors will have, at best, only a marginal effect on conflict recurrence given the stage in the civil war process in which the state is located. This is the case, because the information revealed during the previous conflict mitigates the effect of economic and political grievances by providing sufficient information to show that even if the status quo is disliked, renewed violence will be unlikely to alter the situation, and will only result in further costs. Indeed, if war is thought to be the result of information problems – where rational actors disagree about their relative strength, and thus believe they can achieve a superior distribution of societal goods through fighting – then revealing conclusively that one side is stronger than the other removes a major path to conflict ([Fearon, 1995](#); [Smith and Stam, 2004](#)). Moreover,

there will be little political recourse in such situations as the victorious side will not need to offer further concessions through the political process. Thus, following a military victory, political and economic grievances should play little role in increasing the likelihood of returning to conflict, because even though such factors may still serve as a motivation for conflict, the result of the previous conflict will provide sufficient information that rational actors will be unlikely to expect that war will significantly improve their situation.⁹ Thus:

Hypothesis 4a: *Following a military victory, a more autocratic states will not be significantly more likely to experience a recurrence of conflict.*

Hypothesis 4b: *Following a military victory, lower levels of GDP will not significantly increase the risk of a recurrence of conflict.*

If a state were in a negotiated settlement, however, the opposite would be the case. Because the structure of the bargaining relationship is characterized by a greater degree of uncertainty, actors dissatisfied with the status quo may rationally expect that a return to violence will result in a better outcome, so social and economic hardships will have a much stronger effect in transitioning from a negotiated settlement to conflict than military victory to conflict. In contrast to the situation under a military victory, political concessions – in the form of democratization, or allowing greater access to the political process – will have a positive effect in the sense that they will make the transition from a negotiated settlement to war less likely, and increase the likelihood of a transition to a stable peace. This is the case because, given the uncertainty of both actors as to the relative strength of the

⁹Another possible manner in which the previous outcome of a conflict structures the environment in which actors interact the bargaining situation between actors and more to do with the material condition in which actors find themselves following a military victory. In this framework, the defeated side following a military victory is likely to be substantially weakened from a material and organizational perspective (Wagner, 1993; Licklider, 1995; Quin, Mason and Gurses, 2007) meaning that the interaction that takes place will be between sides that are vastly unequal in terms of their relative capabilities. This is likely to be especially true following a rebel victory, as this typically entails the destruction of the former regime, whereas a government victory will be less likely to completely dismantle the organizational structure of a rebel group (Mason et al., 2011). Nevertheless, such structural conditions will still moderate the effect of political and economic grievances in much the same fashion.

other, coupled with the recent knowledge of a costly conflict, the stronger side may be willing to offer some political concessions in an effort to “buy off” the other side in order to avoid a conflict.

Hypothesis 5a: *Following a negotiated settlement, more democratic states will be less likely to return to violence.*

Hypothesis 5b: *Following a negotiated settlement, wealthier states will be less likely to return to violence.*

Hypothesis 5c: *Following a negotiated settlement, wealthier states, and more democratic states, will be more likely to transition to stable peace.*

Thus, if the prevailing explanation in the literature for war outcomes as information revelation mechanisms holds, it should be the case that following decisive war outcomes, indicators of grievances such as low wealth, and authoritarian institutions should not substantially increase the risk of conflict recurrence, whereas following ambiguous outcomes, such factors should exercise a strong positive effect, making peace far more tenuous.

4 Data and Methods

The data used here come from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, and the UCDP Conflict termination Dataset (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Kreutz, 2010). The definition of civil war is an armed conflict between a government and at least one organized opposition group, which results in at least 25 battle-deaths per year. The time period covered is 1950-2004, due to the availability of GDP data, and as a result the sample is all conflicts that *begin* in 1950 or after. The research design I employ uses the conflict as the unit of analysis, rather than the state.¹⁰ Specifically, a conflict enters the risk set on the first day of the war, and then remains in the risk set until December 31st, 2004. This is slightly different than many standard analyses in that once a subject enters the risk set, it

¹⁰In a number of cases, a state may have more than one conflict occurring simultaneously, for example Ethiopia.

Table 1: Observed Transitions in the Data

| Current Stage | Next Stage | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | War | Negotiated Settlement | Military Victory | Low Activity | Stable Peace |
| War | 0 | 67 | 91 | 127 | 0 |
| Negotiated Settlement | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Military Victory | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 |
| Low Activity | 62 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 39 |
| Positive Peace | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

does not leave, regardless of the stage that it is in. For example, the first conflict in the dataset occurs in Bolivia, and enters the data set when on April 9th, 1952. The conflict terminates in an opposition victory three days later, at which point the conflict transitions to the military victory stage, where it remains until the conflict resumes again in March of 1967. The conflict continues for seven months before terminating in a government victory, and then transitions to stable peace in 1981, where it remains until it is censored in 2004. Table 1 presents all of the observed transitions in the data.

4.1 Dependent Variables

Data for the termination type of a conflict – military victory, negotiated settlement, or inactivity – come from the UCDP Conflict termination Dataset ([Kreutz, 2010](#)). Inactivity is coded if a conflict falls below the 25 battle-death per year threshold. Military victory is coded as the date when one side is defeated militarily, or surrenders. Negotiated settlements are coded as the date when the belligerents in a conflict agree to either a cease-fire, or a full peace agreement.

In order to operationalize stable peace, I consider three factors: the regime type of the state, the relative wealth of the state, and a minimum length of time that must transpire since the conflict ended. One of the key dimensions of positive peace, and thus stable peace, is that the “power to decide over the distribution of resources is [evenly] distributed” ([Galtung, 1969](#), 171). Thus,

regime type is a critical component of positive peace, as the accessibility and competitiveness of the political institutions of the state will determine, in large part, the extent to which individual citizens will be able to exert influence over the distribution of resources. In operationalizing participatory peace, [Doyle and Sambanis \(2006\)](#) require that a state have a polity score of at least 3, indicating that it is more democratic than not (73). A value of 3 indicates that a state is more democratic than not, meaning that its institutions will be at least relatively open and competitive. The next component I consider in operationalizing stable peace is the relative wealth of the state. Specifically, I require that in order for a state to transition to positive peace, its GDP per capita must be equal to or greater than its GDP per capita in the year prior to the onset of the civil war. Based on previous studies, we know that the wealth of a state is one of the most robust factors affecting whether or not it will experience a civil war, thus if a state is to become less vulnerable to a recurrence of conflict, its relative wealth should at least match the level observed prior to the previous conflict. Moreover, the previous component of stable peace took into account the ability of citizens to influence the distribution of resources within a society, whereas this component is designed to approximate the capacity of the state to supply these resources. As the wealth of the state increases, it will have a greater capacity to supply resources throughout the society. Finally, I require that at least one year transpire between the end of a conflict, and the onset of positive peace. This final requirement is based on two factors. First, conceptually, civil wars cannot terminate as a result of positive peace, there must be an intermediate, negative peace, stage between the two. I require that this intermediate stage endure for at least a year, because both polity and GDP are measured annually, and in order to determine whether or not a state has transitioned to stable peace or not, it is necessary to consider the values of these two measures *after* the conflict has concluded.

4.2 Explanatory Variables

I include three explanatory variables in this analysis in order to test the dynamic framework of civil wars. The first factor I consider is the GDP of a state, prior to the onset of a conflict, in order to test whether and how the wealth of a state might affect the timing of post-conflict transitions. These data come from [Gleditsch \(2002\)](#). In order to test the effect of a state's political institutions, I employ the widely-used Polity IV measure of regime type for the state prior to conflict onset ([Marshall and Jaggers, 2002](#)). Finally, I examine the effect of the nature of the conflict – whether the combatants were fighting over territory, or control of the central government, with data coming from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset ([Gleditsch et al., 2002](#)).

4.3 Methods

In order to empirically model this dynamic process, I employ a multistate model. Multistate models are related to competing risks models, which are more widely known in Political Science (for a discussion of competing risk models, see [Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004](#)). The goal of each of these models is to capture a situation in which an individual, a sick patient, a country etc., may be at risk for multiple events rather than just one. For example, a country experiencing a civil war is at risk for three different possible outcomes, rather than just a single outcome representing peace. If this were the extent of what I hoped to model empirically, then a competing risks model would be most appropriate, as it is designed to capture a situation in which an individual is at risk of multiple events simultaneously. However, the additional theoretical concern that I have for the ability of states to transition from one of the peaceful states back to a state of war makes the application of a multistate model more appropriate, because such models are specifically designed to capture a

situation in which events occur sequentially (Therneau and Grambsch, 2010; Putter, Flocco and Geskus, 2007; Putter, 2011). In this context, the sequence of events that occur are a transition from a state of war to one of the states of peace, followed by a potential transition from one of the states of peace back to war, or forward to stable peace. The multistate model is an extension of the more familiar Cox model, however, it differs in that the baseline hazard is stratified – meaning a separate baseline hazard is estimated – for each transition for which a state is at risk. Thus, for every possible transition depicted in Figure 2, a separate baseline hazard is estimated, as the natural rate at which a certain event occurs, for example a transition from a military victory to stable peace, may differ from the rate at which a different event occurs, for example a transition from the negotiated settlement stage to stable peace. In addition to separate baseline hazards, the multistate model also includes transition-specific covariates, meaning that different coefficients are estimated for each transition, allowing the effect of the independent variables to vary depending on the transition.¹¹

5 Analysis

In order to test Hypotheses 1-3, which posit a direct effect of different stages on subsequent transitions, I begin by estimating a non-parametric multi-state model Cox model – that is to say, the baseline hazard is allowed to vary for each transition that a conflict is at risk of experiencing, and for the time being, no covariates are included in the model. In order to interpret the results of this model, it is most straightforward to plot the transition probabilities. Figure 3 presents the stacked transition probabilities that result from the non-parametric model *given that time equals zero, that*

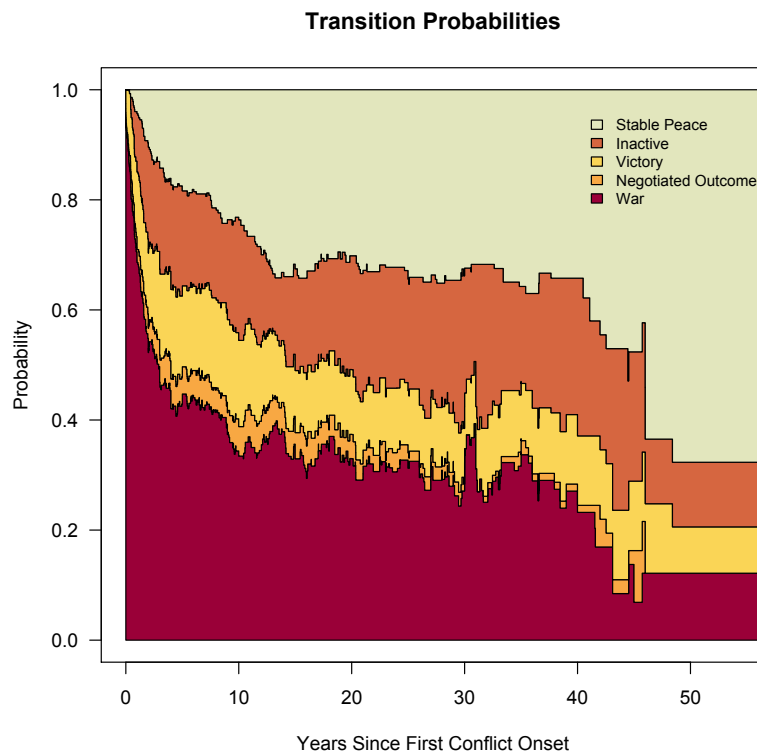
¹¹As noted previously, the more familiar competing risks model is just a special case of a multistate model, with the difference being that in a competing risks model, all individuals begin in the same stage, and are at risk of two or more transitions. To estimate the model, a separate baseline hazard is estimated for each transition, and transition-specific covariates are included in the model.

is the first day the subject is observed, and that the current stage is an ongoing war. Thus, what Figure 3 depicts is a naive estimate of the probability of being in each of the different stages following the initial onset of conflict. A note on interpreting the figure, the distance between two curves reflects the probability of being in the state at any given point in time, so, for example, there is roughly a 30% chance of a subject being in the stable peace state 25 years after experiencing the initial conflict onset, and approximately a 37% chance of experiencing a war 10 years after the initial onset of conflict. One factor that stands out in this and subsequent figures is that the probability of being in a negotiated outcome is relatively rare at any given point in time. Part of the explanation for this is simply that there are proportionally fewer negotiated outcomes in the data than the other types of outcomes.¹² However, it is also the case that conflicts that terminate in negotiated outcomes are more likely to transition to transition to stable peace relatively quickly, providing support to Hypothesis 2.

Figure 4 presents a comparison of transition probabilities holding the observation time constant at seven years, which is approximately the average duration, and varying the stage which is observed at that time. As Figure 4a indicates, a conflict that is currently in a negotiated outcome at year seven is likely to transition out of that stage relatively quickly, the probability of still being in that stage a year later is approximately 50%, and several years after that is reduced much further. In contrast, the probability of being in the stable peace stage increases rapidly, and remains constant at near 50% for much of the rest of the observation time. Figure 4b, by contrast, indicates that military victories, occurring at the same point, may be much stickier processes, as the likelihood of remaining in that particular stage of negative peace is quite high, even ten to twenty years after

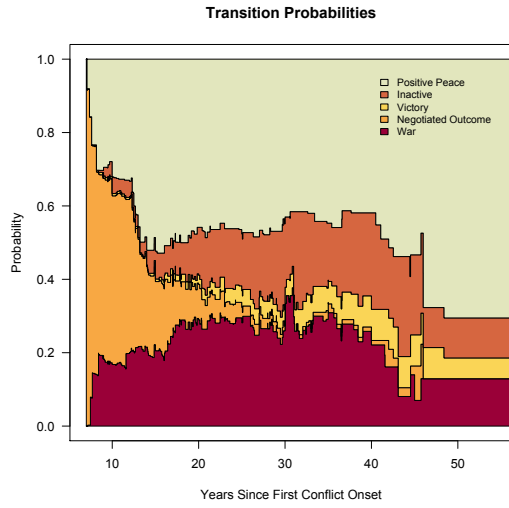
¹²During the Cold War, military victories were considerably more common than negotiated settlements, however this trend has dramatically reversed in the 1990's and 2000's (Hartzell and Hoddie, 2007; Toft, 2010).

Figure 3: Transition probabilities given the initial observation time is zero, and the occupied stage is a war.

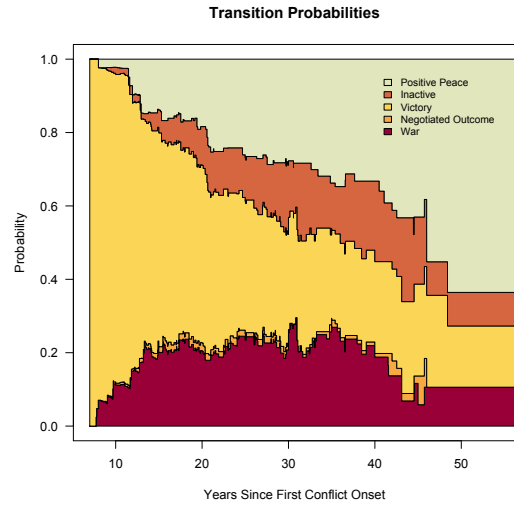


the observation, whereas the probability of being in the stable peace stage is much lower than in Figure 4a. This suggests that military victories may inhibit the transition to stable peace. On the other hand, the probability of transitioning back to war following a military victory appears to be somewhat lower than the probability of transitioning back to war following a negotiated outcome, providing support for Hypothesis 1. Finally, Figure 4d presents the transition probabilities if the observed state at seven years is stable peace. Stable peace seems to greatly reduce the likelihood of occupying any of the negative peace states, likely because the probability of experiencing another conflict is reduced, which inherently reduces the probability of occupying a post-conflict stage. However, the probability of transitioning back to war, while low, is not inconsequential as it is only slightly lower than the probability in the other stages, providing only partial support to

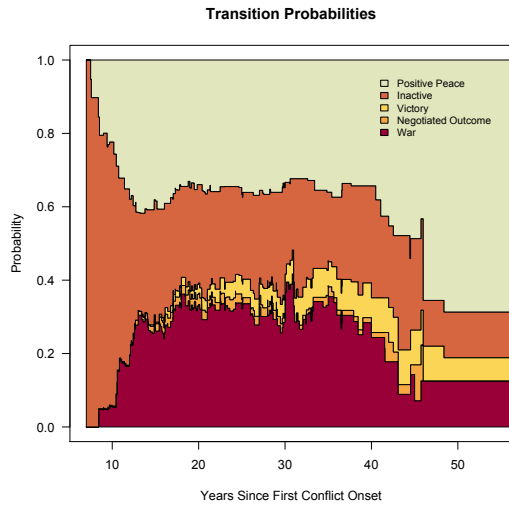
Figure 4: Comparison of Transition Probabilities Given Different Stages at Mean Duration



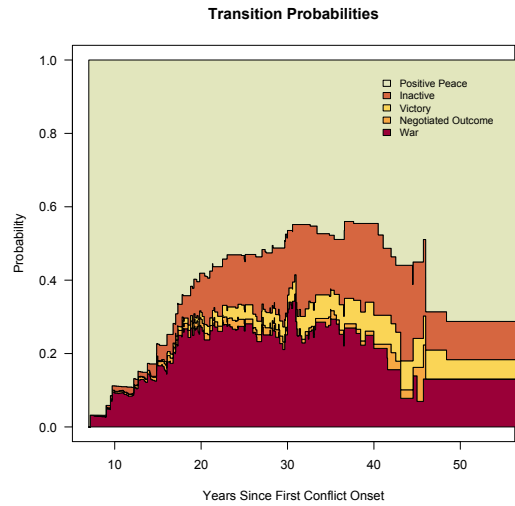
(a) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is a negotiated outcome, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.



(b) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is a military victory, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.



(c) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is low activity, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.



(d) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is stable peace, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.

Hypothesis 3.

In order to test the rest of the hypotheses described above, it is necessary to estimate a semi-parametric multistate model, which includes transition-specific covariates to test whether and how the effect of the three explanatory variables is contingent on the past interactions in a conflict. Ta-

ble 2 presents the results of this full model, with the effect of each independent variable on the difference possible transitions listed in three columns. These variables provide a good initial test for arguments about information provision resulting from different forms of conflict termination. If military victories provide more information about capabilities than do negotiated outcomes, then it should follow that the effect of factors that increase the likelihood of a conflict occurring by exacerbating grievances or providing opportunities should be mitigated. If in a previous conflict one side was defeated militarily, this should provide significant information that the victorious side is stronger, which will in turn reduce the incentive for potential opposition members to rebel, if it is clear that the previous victor is much stronger. Conversely, following an ambiguous outcome, dissatisfied actors may believe that by returning to war they can achieve a better outcome, but this incentive is mitigated following a decisive military victory, because uncertainty regarding capabilities is greatly reduced.

Table 2 offers only mixed support for the previous hypotheses. On the one hand, the effect of GDP per capita on the transition from a military victory to war is negative and only significant at the 0.1 level, indicating that, following military victories, relatively poor countries are only slightly more likely to experience renewed conflict. Similarly, the effect of regime type on the transition from military victory to war is negative, but not significant, suggesting that authoritarian institutions play little to no role in increasing the likelihood of further conflict following a military victory. Taken together, these findings offer support for the Hypotheses 4a and 4b – decisive war outcomes seem to mitigate the effect of grievance variables. This provides some support for the rationalist argument that decisive outcomes in war are an informational revelation mechanism, and that this mechanism has a strong indirect effect on subsequent transitions, by moderating the effect of conflict-inducing factors.

Table 2: Transition-Specific Effects

| Transition | Log GDP per Capita | Regime Type | Governmental Conflict |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Conflict Termination</i> | | | |
| War → Peace Agreement | 0.366** | -0.003 | 0.001 |
| War → Military Victory | 0.005 | -0.054** | 1.51*** |
| War → Low Activity | 0.305*** | -0.056*** | -0.687*** |
| <i>Conflict Recurrence</i> | | | |
| Peace Agreement → War | 0.305*** | 0.079 | 0.791 |
| Military Victory → War | -0.387† | -0.011 | 1.92* |
| Low Activity → War | 0.015 | 0.024 | 0.064 |
| Stable Peace → War | 0.334* | 0.065† | -0.256 |
| <i>Stable Peace</i> | | | |
| Peace Agreement → Stable Peace | 0.376* | 0.102** | -0.769† |
| Military Victory → Stable Peace | 0.253† | 0.222*** | 0.312 |
| Low Activity → Stable Peace | 0.209 | 0.309*** | -0.223 |

Positive coefficients increase the likelihood of a transition, negative values decrease the likelihood.

† significant at the .1 level, * .05 level, ** .01 level, *** .001 level.

On the other hand, the findings for the transition from a negotiated outcome to war offer some evidence to the contrary as the effect of GDP per capita on this transition is positive and highly statistically significant, indicating that wealthier countries that experience a negotiated outcome will be significantly more likely to experience renewed conflict. This finding seems to contradict the rationalist hypothesis expressed in Hypothesis 5b, which would expect ambiguous outcomes to increase the effect of grievance based causes of conflict, but it may be more consistent with the argument put forward by [Mason et al. \(2011\)](#) that negotiated outcomes leave the combatants organizationally intact, and a wealthier state might represent a larger pie to redistribute.¹³ In other words, it is possible that in the wake of a negotiated settlement, former combatants will maintain their arms and organizational capacity, thus providing the capacity required for a return to violence, as well as sufficient ambiguity regarding their capacity relative to the opposition that they may rationally expect to achieve a better outcome by fighting. Moreover, higher levels of GDP, in that context, might in fact provide a motivation for renewed violence, by increasing the potential benefits that can be attained through conflict. The effect of regime type on the transition from negotiated settlement to war is not statistically significant, indicating again that experiencing an ambiguous war outcome does not necessarily increase the effect of an indicator of grievances, contrary to the expectation expressed in Hypothesis 5a.

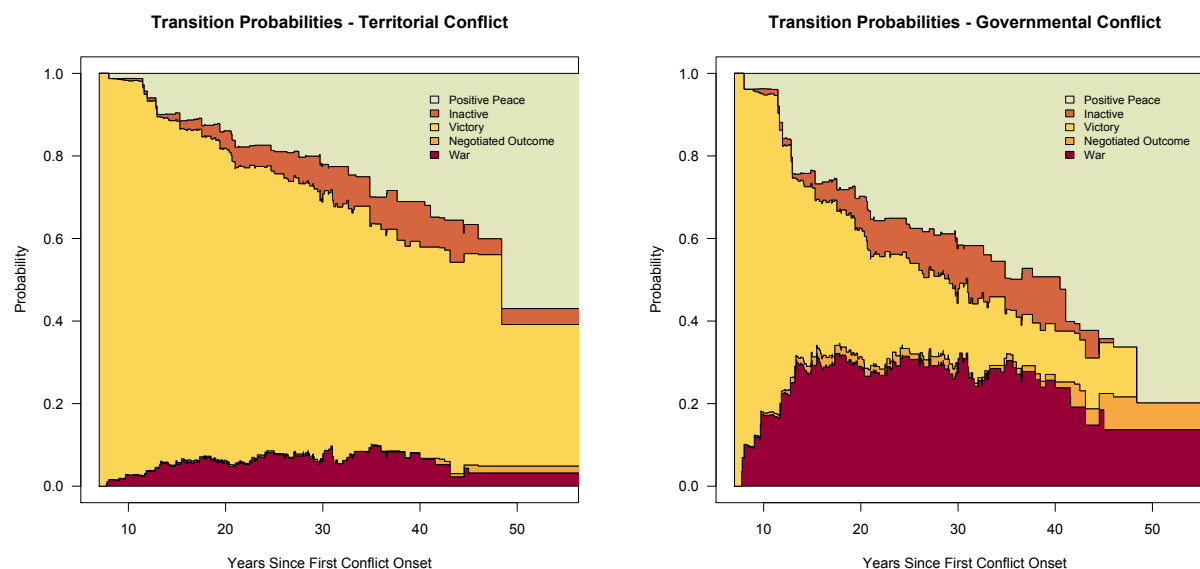
In addition, Table 2 provides strong support for Hypothesis 5c, as wealthier states, and more democratic states are found to transition from peace agreement to stable peace much more quickly than would otherwise be the case. Interestingly, however, it is also found that these factors facilitate the transition from military victory to stable peace as well, indicating that, regardless of outcome,

¹³This logic would also be consistent with other, more traditional, greed or incentive based indicators for conflict like access to gem production or natural resource wealth.

wealthier states and more democratic states will recover much more quickly following a civil war.

One other finding that stands out, is the highly significant effect of the type of conflict on the likelihood of recurrence following a military victory. The coefficient is positive and significant at the $p = .05$ level, indicating that conflicts fought over control of the central government that end in a military victory will be much more likely to recur, whereas territorial conflicts will be substantially less likely to recur. Indeed, as Figure 5a indicates, following a military victory in a territorial conflict, the likelihood of returning to war is minimal, whereas the probability of experiencing another governmental conflict – Figure 5b – following a military victory is substantially increased. This finding underscores the importance of taking into account the dynamic nature of civil wars for two reasons. First, the effect of conflict type shown in Figure 5 is highly contingent on the transition in question. When conflicts end in military victories, the nature of the conflict plays a substantial role in subsequent transitions. However, following peace agreements, the nature of the previous conflict is not statistically significant, meaning that it has little to no impact on whether a state will transition back to war. Without taking into account historical contingency, this effect would be masked by pooling together all transitions from negative peace back to war. Second, it highlights the importance of taking into account dynamics in the study of conflict. If we were only to consider the relationship between governmental conflict and the termination of conflict, it might be possible to conclude that such conflicts are good for peace – the coefficient for governmental conflict on the transition from war to military victory is positive and significant at the $p = 0.001$ level, meaning that governmental conflicts tend to be much shorter than other conflicts. However, the dynamic study conducted here reveals the flip-side of that same coin: while governmental conflicts tend to be much shorter – increasing the likelihood of military victories – such victories are likely to be short-lived, as the probability of returning to conflict following such a conflict is substantial. Thus,

Figure 5: Comparison of Transition Probabilities For Territorial and Governmental Conflicts Following Military Victory



(a) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is a military victory, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.

(b) Transition probabilities given that the current stage is a military victory, observed at the mean duration, about 7 years.

a dynamic study of conflict reveals a fuller picture of these effects, and shows that the effect of the same factor, in this case conflict over control of the state, is likely to be highly contingent – promoting shorter wars *and* shorter spells of peace

6 Conclusion

Civil wars disproportionately occur in a relatively small number of states, yet few explicit mechanisms have been offered to explain this pattern. Most studies attempting to explain this empirical regularity have pointed to a “conflict trap” in which poverty and state weakness lead to civil war, which further exacerbates poverty and state weakness, thus increasing the likelihood of conflict recurrence through the same mechanisms that produced the initial conflict. While there is undoubtedly truth in this assessment, it is nevertheless unable to explain the variation that we observe

in the recurrence of conflict – while many civil wars recur, most don't. To overcome this weakness then, I have offered a novel conceptualization of civil wars that views conflicts as a dynamic, contingent process rather than a series of discrete outcomes. Within this new framework, I emphasize the importance of history for explaining the course that conflicts will take. By conceptualizing civil wars as a series of interconnected phases embedded within a larger process, I am able to explore the manner in which past outcomes, and the timing of previous events shape the structure of the choices available to actors in the future.

Specifically, this framework has enabled me to more specifically test rationalist arguments about the effect of conflict termination type on subsequent transitions – that different termination types reveal different levels of information. While this informational mechanism does suggest a direct effect, largely confirmed in the above analyses, between the type of termination and the likelihood of conflict recurrence, the more important implication of this argument is that the information revealed through conflict termination will structure the future interactions between actors. As a result, information is more likely to have an indirect effect on future transitions, as it primarily serves to structure the environment in which actors interact, and thus it moderates the effect of conflict-inducing factors. This study found mixed support for these informational arguments – largely confirming these contentions following military victories, but finding, at best, mixed support following peace agreements.

More broadly, this study has sought to introduce a new framework for analyzing civil wars that implements the suggestions of [Pierson \(2004\)](#); [Diehl \(2006\)](#), among others, who advocate for a more integrated approach to the study of political phenomena. To this end, I have reconceptualized civil wars as a dynamic process – a series of sequential stages – rather than a list of discrete outcomes, which provides a more holistic view of the entire civil war process, rather than just fo-

cusing on individual elements. This approach furthers existing studies of civil wars by integrating the analysis of the different phases of civil wars into a single framework, thereby avoiding a significant source of bias that stems from ignoring prior interactions. This approach has revealed, critically, that civil wars are far more complex than conventional studies appreciate, as the factors most frequently associated with war and peace are in fact highly contingent, as they may lead to either war, or peace, *depending on when and in what context they occur*. Thus, this study points to an important finding for policymakers confronted with protracted or recurrent conflicts – that in order to understand the causes of these conflicts, it is necessary to not only consider the present circumstances, but also the information revealed previously. Understanding the roles of both the past and present will better enable policymakers to secure peace in the future.

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